

When the critics speak, the CIA chief takes the offensive

For Casey, a long career of weathering storms

The wonder of William Casey may be less his buildup of the CIA than how he kept his power through controversies that might have defeated less determined men.

Since 1981, Casey has weathered storms over his finances, the choice of a political operative to run his clandestine operations, the CIA's mining of Nicaraguan harbors and his own role in Ronald Reagan's 1980 campaign. He has clashed often with Congress, surviving calls for his firing from left and right.

Yet Casey today appears more secure than ever as the U.S.'s top spy. His secret—beyond his close ties to Reagan—seems to be a combination of keen intelligence, crustiness and unwavering confidence in his own judgment.

Those qualities have been evident most of his life. Left fatherless at an early age, the grandson of an Irish immigrant worked his way through Fordham University. While in St. John's law school,



Then, head of OSS spies in Europe

he supported himself, his mother and siblings investigating welfare cases. By his mid-30s, he had made his first million as a lawyer, tax expert and investor.

At first glance, nothing about Casey suggests toughness. A tall, stoop-shouldered man in a rumpled suit, he sometimes mumbles and casts a mild gaze at the world through heavy glasses. With his gray hair and lined face, he strikes the casual eye as a tired executive on the last commuter train home.

But Casey is hardly mild-mannered. At a Washington party, he startled guests by snapping at the head of the Senate Intelligence Committee: "I'm not going to take any more of this s***

from you people." It was vintage Casey—deference rare, defiance toward all who would rein him in.

A jealous guardian

He is very sensitive to criticism. While attending a dinner of former Office of Strategic Services (OSS) colleagues, Casey erupted at Mark Wyatt, an old intelligence hand who had criticized CIA handling of defectors. Wyatt, he snapped, was a "selfish bastard" and "publicity seeker."

Casey was controversial long before he got the CIA job. As Richard Nixon's choice to head the Securities and Exchange Commission in 1971, he faced stiff congressional opposition because of allegations that he had breached securities laws. He prevailed by convincing Congress that the lawsuits were trivial irritants that plague any big executive.

His stormy SEC reign led Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) to quip that Casey was the "second most outrageous" chairman after Kennedy's father, Joseph P. Kennedy. As at the CIA later, Casey brooked no meddling in his rule.

Only five months after Casey took the CIA command, Republican senators were calling for his ouster. The reasons: Yet another lawsuit over Casey's business dealings, as well as his appointment of Max Hugel, a politician and businessman with no intelligence experience, to head clandestine operations. Hugel was forced to resign.

Even more controversial was his role in "Debategate," the appearance of former President Carter's briefing book in the Reagan campaign before the debate between the two candidates in 1980. Treasury Secretary James Baker, then a Reagan campaign official, said he got the book from Casey. Casey, the campaign manager, denied it. The tension in their relationship endures.

Casey brought his most serious problem on himself by refusing to follow standard practice and place his wealth, estimated at \$15 million, in a blind trust. It was two years before he relinquished control, and then only after reports that he held stock in firms that dealt with the CIA. Even then, he re-

fused to include \$7.5 million worth of stock in Capital Cities Communications, which later took over ABC.

The blind-trust issue opened Casey to charges that he could be using one of the most sensitive public positions to line his pockets. Legality aside, say critics, he had plainly violated the spirit of post-Watergate reforms aimed at imposing ethical standards. "Here's a guy with more information about what's going on in the world than anyone, shifting large sums from wheat to oil," said a former White House aide.

"It was outrageous."

The clamor only stiffened Casey's resolve to stay in the job. More than his personal pride was at stake. Casey was determined to return the CIA to the glory days that he knew when serving in the OSS, the agency's forerunner, and all signs point toward his staying through the Reagan Presidency. "Every time he's been under fire, he has been willing to gut it out," said Stuart



Now, head of all U.S. intelligence

Spencer, a former Reagan political lieutenant. "And it worked."

Although a number of Casey's actions have caused Reagan problems, the White House has yet to admonish Casey—at least publicly. "He is too formidable," says a former presidential adviser. "He wouldn't take anybody's guff."

by Maureen Santini